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August 15, 2007

Administrator R. David Paulison
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Administrator Paulison:

I am writing because it has come to my attention that FEMA's Flood Map Modernization Program has not attempted to incorporate recent data on the affects of climate change. This oversight could mean that local decisionmakers and millions of homeowners are relying on maps that indicate a much lower risk of flooding than what actually exists.

Earlier this month I convened a conference on flooding in New Jersey to gather all of our local stakeholders and begin the process of addressing flooding on a state-wide basis. The conference was a great success, and several obstacles to a truly coordinated flood mitigation effort were discussed. Perhaps one of the most serious topics of discussion was the fact that FEMA is not incorporating into its map modernization program data from the United States Geological Survey, NOAA, or other groups that have assessed the role of climate change on increasing flood risks. In fact, I learned that FEMA's Flood Map Modernization Program does not even employ a single staffer who has global warming expertise.

The Flood Map Modernization Program is a critically important effort designed to update and make more readily available digital flood risk maps. This, in turn, will enable communities and citizens across the country to easily obtain flood hazard data, learn about their flood risk, and make informed decisions about floodplain development and flood mitigation projects. As you know, Congress has already appropriated over $800 million for the Map Modernization Program, and we will likely appropriate $200 million more for FY08. With this $1 billion in funding, FEMA hopes to modernize and digitize flood maps covering the area where 92% of our country lives by 2008 or 2009. But if FEMA is not incorporating the latest data on sea level rise, storm strength or rainfall in these maps, then even the most updated flood maps may be obsolete before they are even published.

Failing to incorporate such data could be putting billions of dollars of property and thousands of lives at risk. For example, in New Jersey, several factors make the risk of flooding much greater now than when most flood maps were created. Climate change and land subsidence has already caused sea level to rise 14 inches relative to the New Jersey Shore from the beginning of last century and it is projected to rise 16 to 31 inches higher by the end of this century. In addition, New Jersey is experiencing 4 inches more rainfall per year than it did in the first half of the 20th century and this trend is expected to

continue. Lastly, rising sea surface temperatures are causing stronger storms that cause larger storm surges and drop more rain in a shorter period of time.

Taken together all of these factors mean that my home state is at an ever increasing risk of flooding. And we have already seen the effects. To take just one area of our state as an example, in 2004, 2005 and 2006, the Delaware River Valley experienced four severe flood events in succession causing the worst flooding in half a century.

These factors also mean that the maps FEMA is generating now do not accurately reflect flood risks. One hundred year floods are happening more frequently, and if homeowners, insurers, political leaders, the Army Corps of Engineers, or anyone else is going to make well-informed decisions on development or flood mitigation they need accurate updated maps. Further, on an ongoing basis, FEMA needs to have a plan to continually update maps as the affects of climate change worsen. Planning for floods should be forward looking and not based on historical data.

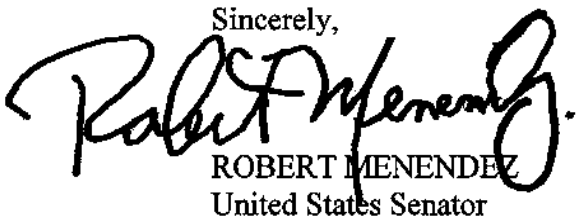
In light of this urgent need, I ask the following questions:

1. Why is FEMA not incorporating recent effects of climate change data into their flood maps? Is it part of a larger effort to downplay the impacts of climate change? Why does FEMA not have anyone with climate change expertise in their Flood Map Modernization Program?
2. Does FEMA have any plans to gather data concerning the effects of global warming on an ongoing basis and incorporate that data into flood maps and disaster planning? If so, what are they?
3. Does FEMA need more resources to help fund localized studies of how climate change is affecting specific flood-prone areas?

In addition to answering these questions, I also ask that FEMA undertake a systematic effort to gather data on the effects of global warming and incorporate that data into its map modernization efforts as soon as possible.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



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United States Senator